

The Importance and Necessity of Christian Moderation:

A

S E R M O N,

P R E A C H E D

At the CATHEDRAL in WORCESTER,

On SUNDAY, MARCH 7, 1779,

AT THE ASSIZES HELD BY

Mr. BARON PERRY, and Mr. JUSTICE BULLER.

By the REVEREND THOMAS MOSS, A. B.
MINISTER OF BRIERLY-HILL, STAFFORDSHIRE.

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TO
JOHN FOSTER, Esq;
HIGH-SHERIFF
OF THE
COUNTY OF WORCESTER,
THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE
IS HUMBLY DEDICATED,
IN TESTIMONY OF THAT RESPECT,
WHICH IS DUE TO DISTINGUISH'D MERIT,
AND OF THAT GRATITUDE,
WHICH PECULIAR FAVORS CLAIM.

T. M.

JOHN FOSTER

1840-1841

COUNTY OF WORCESTER

THE FOLLOWING DISCLOSURE

IN THE MATTER OF

THE ESTATE OF JOHN FOSTER

DECEASED

AND

THE ESTATE OF

A

S E R M O N, &c.

PHILL. Chap. iv. Ver. 5.

*Let your Moderation be known unto all Men—The
Lord is at Hand.*

W HATEVER tends to promote the Happiness of civil Society, and the Welfare of our immortal Souls, should be the grand Pursuit of every reasonable Creature—but so blind is the Generality of Men to their real Interest, that they frequently forget, and disregard both—and therefore it is as necessary in this, as in the apostolic Age, to exhort them to the christian Virtue of Moderation—that when their heavenly Lord, who is at Hand, shall appear, “ they may
“ also appear with him in Glory.”

But it may be proper, before I proceed further, to mention (at least to some Part of my Hearers) that Moderation, in its * original Meaning, signifies, I apprehend, such a Disposition of Mind, as prefers Mildness or Equity to the extreme Right or Rigor of the Law—or, in other Words, which inclines us to make some Abatement to our strict and legal Demands, and not to prosecute an Adversary to his

* Τὸ ἐπιεικὲς.

B

Injury

Injury and Ruin, “ when it is in the Power of our Hands “ to do it”——and all this, in Consideration of that awful Day, when we ourselves shall stand in Need of Mercy from the supreme and universal Judge.

Now the Duty, which I am recommending, is of the greatest Importance and Necessity to all Ranks and Degrees of Men—It is the Basis and Ornament of every Community, and the Comfort and Happiness of human Life—It is possible indeed, that, by Arms, Violence, and Cruelty, Kingdoms may be obtained—but whatever be the Frame of their Government, if “ the Throne be not established by Righteousness,” they cannot continue long.—It is possible that in our Intercourses and Dealings with the World, there may be some specious Appearances of Justice and Friendship, but unless “ we do unto others, as we would they should do “ unto us,” we shall be guilty of the basest Prevarication, and shall be Strangers to all true Peace and Amity.

It is certain, that Laws are the principal Pillars upon which every Nation rests, and that these, when rightly executed, give Grace and Beauty to the whole Building—but it must be remembered, that in every Law, there is a Mitigation, and an Extremity of Punishment included—If it be urged according to the strict Letter of it, when the Circumstances of a Crime or Person admit of Lenity, the Sentence or Decision becomes extreme—and, by such a Procedure, it is so far from just, that it is * highly injurious—and hence it is the Opinion of many Writers, that this is the Meaning of the divine Command—“ be not righteous over-much”—or

* *Summum Jus est summa Injuria*—a Sentiment which, in some Measure, is confirmed by the Heathen Poet——

*Est Modus in Rebus, sunt certi denique Fines
Quos ultra citraque nequit consistere Rectum.*

H O R.

as it might be translated, "be not too just," lest, by going beyond certain Limits, you make Justice a Color or Pretence for Cruelty.

But Equity consists in relaxing this Rigor—and in moderating, on good and sufficient Grounds, the prescribed Penalty—And we are prompted to this Duty both by Reason and Humanity—for as all Lawgivers are frail and fallible, it is impossible that they should foresee, and set down all those Circumstances and Accidents, which may afterwards occur—Such Knowledge is too great for Man—This can only be done by an infinite and omniscient God—those immutable Laws, which he has given us for the Regulation of our Conduct are, like himself, complete and absolute—they are such as can never be accused of Injustice or Severity, and are of equal Force at all Times, and in all Places.—But the Laws of Man, like all Things that are finite, are subject to Error and Imperfection—and hence it follows, that we are as much obliged to mitigate their Rigor, when there is just Cause for it, as to execute their Extremity, when Necessity requires it—It is from the prudent Observance of this Rule, that Justice receives its Honor—and whoever, incautiously neglects it, may, on the one Hand, be guilty of great Cruelty, and on the other, may give Occasion to many Disorders, and Confusions in the World.

It is true, that in our Laws the Extremity is expressed in plain Terms, and the Mitigation is concealed—and the Reason is, that licentious Men may be terrified by the one, and may not be tempted to transgress by the other—and in this the Wisdom of our ancient Lawgivers is eminently displayed. They foresaw, no doubt, that Mercy was as necessary as Punishment—they knew the Obduracy of most Men's Consciences, and the Aptitude of all to offend—it was therefore

fore thought proper, that the Punishment should be plainly expressed, and the Mitigation of it should be left to the Discretion of the Magistrate—and a discreet Magistrate will be tenacious of both—for he knows that the one, is for the Terror and Restraint of Evil-doers, and that the other, is for the Comfort and “ Praise of them that do well.”

It is doubtless of essential Importance, that, in all our judicial Proceedings, there should be a due Temperament of Justice and Mercy—These, like two cordial Friends should be inseparably united—for as Mercy without Justice is foolish Pity, so Justice without Mercy is Cruelty and Oppression—It is the reciprocal Harmony of these Virtues that gives Stability and Happiness to any Nation—It is by these that Peace and Concord take Root and flourish—the Magistrate becomes “ a Minister of God for the Good” of the People—and the Monarch adds a brighter Lustre to his Crown.

It would ill become me to say more on this Subject, in the Presence of those learned and distinguished Persons, whom I have the Honor this Day to address—and I should not have presumed thus far, if I had not been convinced, that Candor is the Produce of the greatest and noblest Minds.

Now it is, I believe, universally allowed, that Equity essentially depends upon the particular Circumstances of each individual Case—and that it is impossible to prescribe, on that Account, any established Rules and fixed Precepts, without destroying its very Essence, and reducing it to a positive Law—but give me Leave to say—that there are many important Duties included in it, which we, as Christians, and Members of Society, are indispensably obliged to practise.

And,

And first, we are to bear with Patience the Frailties and Infirmities of others—These are so many and obvious, that it would be difficult as well as needless to point them out—and yet, these, whatever they be, if not enormous and dangerous in their Consequences, it is our Duty to tolerate—and hence the wise Man says—that “ Discretion defereth Anger, and it is the Glory of a Man to pass by a “ Transgression”—Such a Transgression it must be meant, as arises not from premeditated Malice or Revenge—when this is not the Case, christian “ Charity is not easily provoked—it thinketh no Evil, beareth all Things, and endureth all Things”—it inclines us to throw a Veil over those small Blemishes which Humanity is Heir to, and instead of proclaiming them to the Injury of any one, it considers them with the tenderest Compassion—“ it beareth “ all Things” that are consistent with a good Conscience, and the Laws of our most holy Religion—I mean, when the Wrong is offered only to ourselves, and brings with it no Dishonor to our God, nor any bad Example to his Church.—Thus will every Man act who wishes to tread the Paths of christian Righteousness—for this is his Commendation, and this his Glory—and without it, it is impossible to have true Peace and Comfort in the World.

But we are also required to put the most favourable Construction upon Things which are doubtful.—We are too apt, God knows! to deprave the Words and Actions of others—to darken the brightest Perfections, and to cast a Blot upon the whitest Innocence; and from these Sources it generally happens that Quarrels and Dissentions arise—but we have seen that it is the Characteristic of christian Charity “ to think no Evil”—and it is for Want of this Virtue, that the Bonds of Friendship and Society are so frequently broken—thus we read, that the Words and Actions of the immaculate Jesus himself were misrepresented

sented by the Jews—"Destroy this Temple," says he, "and in three Days I will raise it up,"—this was interpreted as signifying the Temple of Jerusalem, when he only meant the Temple of his Body—and we find that this was the principal Accusation which was brought against him at his Death.—We read in another Place, that Christ "came to fulfil the Law," and yet that he was accused "as a Destroyer of it"—and in the old Testament it is recorded, that the wrong Interpretation of an Embassy from David was the Cause of a great War between the Israelites and the Ammonites, in which many thousand Lives were lost—from these and many other Instances which might be produced, it is evident, that the Misconstruction of any Thing doubtful is the Origin of much Trouble and Enmity in the World.

And therefore, if we are the Children of Peace, and the Disciples of him who was the Prince and Author of it, let us always endeavour to preserve it by a charitable Opinion of others—and let us remember—that he is the best Christian, and the best Promoter of social Unity, who the least censures others, and the most reforms himself.

But it is further required of us, (and even a * Heathen has pronounced it "not only liberal but advantageous,") to depart, in some Cases, from our own strict and legal Right.—This will seem difficult to those, whose Views are confined to the scanty Limits of the present World, and who walk by that "Wisdom which is from beneath."—But we have sufficient Examples in the holy Scriptures to recommend this Duty to us—for let us consider, how Abraham acted in his Contest with Lot:—"Let there be no Strife I pray thee," says that holy Patriarch,

* Tull. Offic. lib. ii. C. xviii.

" between

“ between me and thee—for we are Brethren—is not
 “ the whole Land before thee? If thou wilt take the left
 “ Hand, then will I go to the right; or if thou go to the
 “ right Hand, then I will take the left.”—Here, by the
 Right of Seniority, he might have made his own Choice;
 and yet, for the Sake of Peace, he freely recedes from it—
 and if we are Abraham’s Children, we must do Abraham’s
 Works.

But let us look to the blessed Jesus, the true Seed of
 Abraham, as the most shining Pattern of this Virtue—He
 refus’d not to pay the Tribute-Money, tho’ he was free, and
 no Law could oblige him to it—and the Reason was, that
 he might give no Cause of Offence and Contention, and that
 he might “ leave us an Example that we should follow his
 “ Steps”—and if we are his sincere and undissembled Fol-
 lowers—if we wish for the Blessings of this Life, or of that
 which is to come, we shall go, and immediately “ do like-
 “ wise.”

The last Thing which I shall mention as required of us,
 is, to forgive Injuries and Wrongs that are done to us—and
 to this we are strongly urged both by Reason and Revela-
 tion—for as “ in many Things we all offend,” and are every
 Moment in Danger of falling, we know not but we our-
 selves may stand in Need of Forgiveness from the Hands of
 others—and if we consider that we are Christians, how can
 we expect Remission of our Sins, if we “ forgive not our
 “ Brother his Trespases against us”—How great then is the
 Necessity of this Duty!—the Preservation of Peace depends
 upon it, and without it, there is no Religion, and no Hope
 of an eternal Reward—for if we forgive not others, we are as-
 sured that God will not forgive us—and without Forgiveness,
 I speak to the most righteous amongst us, which of us can
 be saved?

Happy

Happy then would it be for the World, and happier for our Souls, if this Branch of Moderation were more generally adopted!—there would then be no vexatious Litigations, and no expensive Actions at Law—Actions that are often commenced upon the most trifling and frivolous Occasions, and which answer no End, but to gratify a malicious and unforgiving Temper—but how much better would it be, how much more consistent with Christianity, and a good Conscience, if we would forgive the Injury, and remit the Recompence, where the Damage is small and insignificant?

It is true, as the Apostle expresses it, “the Law is good, “if a Man use it lawfully.”—In Matters, we must understand it, of considerable Moment, and as the last Means of attaining Peace—but as every Law-Suit is a Kind of War, and as War either is, or should be, the last Means of attaining public Peace, so should it be in Regard to that Peace which should subsist between private Persons and Families.

And now what are the Duties which I have laid down, but the plain Dictates of Reason and Humanity, to the Truth of which every Man is forced to assent—or what is the Discharge of them, but “to do unto others as we “would they should do unto us?”—for let us lay our Hands upon our Breasts, and ask our Consciences, whether we would not wish those Duties to be exercis’d towards ourselves?—If that Monitor, which is within us, inform us, that we certainly would, we should be as attentive to it as to the Voice of God, and should go, and treat others in the same Manner—such is the Excellence of that divine Precept which our blessed Saviour has transmitted to us!— and great would be our Happiness, if we prized it according to its real Value!—

I have

I have read that the Emperor * Severus was so enraptured with it, that he caused it to be inscribed on 'his Palace in several Places, and that he was about to erect a Temple to the Honor of Jesus Christ.—But let us, my Brethren! rather inscribe it upon our Hearts—let us make it the Rule of all our Actions, and we shall consecrate ourselves into a holy Temple—a fit Habitation for the Spirit of Christ to dwell in.

It is certain, that by the conspicuous and uniform Display of such Conduct, we must “let our Moderation be known”—not to this, or that Man in particular, but to all without Exception—and we have a most weighty Consideration to excite us to this, and every other christian Duty, from the near Approach of that awful Time, when Mercy will be all that we shall wish for, and when our Actions will be known to Angels and to Men.

Now I doubt not, that I am speaking to those, who have a firm Faith in that holy Religion, which they, and the Laws profess—and what is it which the Doctrines of that Religion declare to us?—There it is written as with a Sunbeam, not only that our Lord will come to judge the World, but that his Coming is near at Hand.—“Behold,” says he, “I come quickly, and my Reward is with me, to give to every one according as his Works shall be.”—It is true, that many Ages have elapsed since this Declaration was made—but if we consider, who it was who made it, “the Alpha and Omega, “the Beginning and the End, the first and the last,” we shall have no Reason to impeach his Fidelity—for however long it may appear to us, yet in his Eye, who can look through immense Duration, it is but a short Space between the Pro-

* Alexander Severus the 21st Roman Emperor; who, by his Virtue and Prudence, restored the State of Rome, which had been greatly disordered by the Vices of his Predecessor Heliogabalus.—He took the Name of Alexander because he was born at Arcæna, in a Temple which was dedicated to Alexander Magnus.

mise and the Completion.—In Regard to ourselves indeed, it may be truly said, that “our Redemption draweth nigh”—It is as near to us as we are to the Grave, and to that we are all hastening as swift as the Wings of Time can carry us—It is but the Flight of a few Moments more, and we shall see the Lord “coming in the Clouds of Heaven with “Power and great Glory”—and how then shall we prepare ourselves for that august and magnificent Appearance?—“What shall we do when God riseth up, and when he “visiteth what shall we answer him?”—my Brethren! we have an Emblem at this Time, a very faint one indeed, in Comparison, of the grand Solemnities of the last and universal Assize—but faint as this Emblem is, there are many interesting and instructive Lessons to be learned from it.—Let us consider then how a poor Criminal acts who expects daily to be tried for his Life—does he give himself up to a listless and torpid Indolence, or does he meditate upon vain and sinful Amusements till he is summoned to the Bar?—no, he begins to have a serious Sense of his unhappy Situation—he consults the ablest Lawyers, makes all the Interest he can, studies his Answers to the Indictment that will be brought against him, and takes every Precaution to make a good Defence—and why is he at all these Pains and Concern?—It is but to preserve a little longer the small Remainder of a miserable Life—and shall we do nothing to save our Souls, which are to live for ever?—Shall we be negligent in a Cause of so much greater Urgency, and where our Labor is sure to be crowned with Success?—Oh! let us remember that we, like him, are guilty Creatures, who are shortly to be released from the Fetters of Mortality, and to go forth from the Prison of this World—that we shall stand on our Trial at “the Judgment Seat of Christ,” and shall hear that irrevocable Sentence passed upon us, which will award us to everlasting Happiness or Misery.

Let

Let us then strive with all our Might that we may at that Time “ be found of him in Peace—Let us give Diligence,” (the Diligence of a whole Life is not too much) “ to make our Calling and Election sure”—but above all, let us “ be Followers of God” in his darling Attribute of Mercy—and then we need not doubt that he will recognize us as his “ dear Children”—he will not “ be extreme “ to mark what we have done amiss,” but will receive us, like a tender Father, into the Arms of his Mercy, and will repose us in the Bosom of his Happiness for ever and ever.

F I N I S.

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